



Counselors School Improvement Institute

September 2003/February 2004

Little Rock, Arkansas

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New High School Improvement Institutes Reinforce Critical Role of Counselors

Throughout the country, teachers, principals, parents, and volunteers are working hard to make high school learning experiences for students exciting, creative, challenging, and, most of all, successful.

But, there's one critical group of people that must be part of the high school's efforts - counselors.

In many schools, counselors have their hands full. Often the ratio of counselors to students is one to dozens, if not hundreds of students.

"Do you really expect counselors to provide complete guidance and advisement when they have 500 students?" said Billie Donegan, a nationally-known leader for her over 25 years' experience establishing successful school improvement efforts at South Grand Prairie High School in Grand Prairie Texas.

Addressing that dilemma and other issues was the purpose of part one of the "Arkansas High Schools That Work (HSTW) Counselors School Improvement Institute," designed by the Office of School Improvement of the state Department of Workforce Education's Career and Technical Education Section.

The two-day institute brought together teams from the state's HSTW sites to



Billie Donegan outlines a checklist of what schools should include in their action plans if "you are truly going to 'leave no child behind.'"



"Let us know you care ..." Students from Conway and North Little Rock high schools shared their views on school improvement during a panel presentation during the September institute. Other panel members said educators sometimes assume students know more than they actually do. All agreed students need to do better in letting teachers and counselors know if they need help.

learn how Ms. Donegan and others from HSTW sites across the country are taking new approaches to student learning to raise student achievement.

"A school's counseling program should be an integral part of a student's daily environment ... and the mission of the school," said Dr. Jim Rollins, Superintendent of the

Springdale School District, who gave the welcoming address. "In my view, a counselor's number one job in this time of enormous educational change is to do everything he or she can to help get kids academically prepared ... proficient or advanced," he said.

The HSTW model, created in 1987 by the Southern Regional Education Board, provides a structure for school improvement where all staff members work together for student achievement – rather than working in isolation.

"I taught English for 24 years and never knew a math teacher," Ms. Donegan said.

Participants took part in 13 breakout sessions that focused on best practices in school improvement. Time was also allotted for teams to analyze their own school improvement activities and design goals to develop or expand the counselor's role in school improvement.

Technical assistance was provided by DWE staff and the visiting HSTW teachers.

All teams left the institute with an assignment: to return in early 2004 to share their plans and give a progress report on implementation. The following pages capture the work of the teams who are eager to share their results.

Arkadelphia High School

"Recycling" takes on a whole new meaning in Arkadelphia High School's improvement plan.

The Arkadelphia High School team decided to focus on providing extra help in math after reviewing school statistics. They found that 80 percent of students scored at Basic or Below Basic on the Algebra I exam and that 20 students failed the Algebra I course. Another 60 percent of students scored at Basic or Below Basic on the Geometry end-of-course exam.

With a focus on helping students succeed in math, Arkadelphia will be using teachers and paid peer tutors to help these students.

The "Algebra I Recycle Class" will be conducted by tutors for students who did not pass Algebra I. For other students, peer tutoring will be provided before, during, and after school. These peer tutors are paid \$8.00 per hour from a local grant. Also, math teachers have committed to be available before and after school for departmental tutoring.



Cabot High School

Cabot High School is conducting Career Action Planning conferences at the junior and senior high school level. The school is taking these steps to hopefully reduce a 19 percent dropout in grades 10 through 12.

Other goals of Career Action Planning are to create a school-wide and community-wide culture of high expectations and involve families and teachers in guidance and advisement.





Conway High School

With the Capstone course approved for next year, Conway High School will bring Billie Donegan in to facilitate teacher training.



Course frameworks are in development and curriculum planning and development will continue throughout the summer.

El Dorado High School



El Dorado High School counselors, teachers, and administrators want to do more to help students boost literacy skills using the contextual learning opportunities provided by career and technical education courses.

School staff is currently reviewing career and technical education course offerings, particularly the Technical and Professional Education programs of study. Staff is also working to promote these programs of study among all patrons of the school district.

Career and technical education teachers have received training in Technical Writing. They are using those new skills and the career and technical education courses in this school-wide effort to improve literacy by helping students increase their basic reading and writing skills.

At the same time, students will have a greater awareness of the increased career and postsecondary education opportunities that come with successful completion of career and technical education courses.



Fort Smith –Northside High School

Helping junior high students manage the transition to high school is the goal of the Northside High School team.

Team members felt placing students into appropriate courses would make the transition process easier and would lead to improved academic achievement.

An orientation was held for ninth-grade students to recommend appropriate courses.



Fort Smith – Southside High School

Improving the process for aligning classroom placement with a student's career interests is the goal of the Fort Smith Southside team. The team is using the Kuder Career Planning System's Interest Inventory to determine career interests.

The inventory was given to all 10th grade students and a small percentage of 11th graders in 2003-2004. Counselors are using the results of the PLAN assessment and the results of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery as they work with the student to plan their 2004-2005 class schedules.

Kuder results will also be used by the school's work-based learning coordinators to match students with job opportunities in the community.



Hamburg High School

The Hamburg High School team is working to strengthen its Career Action Planning (CAP) process.

Counselors and other team members have worked with Workforce Education staff and colleagues from Fayetteville, Rogers, Springdale, Monticello, and Drew Central high schools to research how they have used teachers in an advisement/mentoring role. Nina Woodall of Springdale High School conducted a day-long inservice for Hamburg on CAP and extra help sessions.

The Hamburg team has produced a new CAP Guide to assist students in their college and career choices. Team members met with school CAP groups five times in the spring and also wrapped up CAP conferences with students and parents before school was out.

The final CAP event of the year was Arena Registration on May 18. Arena Registration is a user-friendly scheduling event where students make their own schedules as they sign up for classes. The team felt the registration went well.





Hot Springs High School

Hot Springs High School counselors have implemented an "Extra Mile" program to strengthen relationships with ninth grade students enrolled in Milestones.

Each semester during the school year, counselors established a timeline and coordinated small group meetings between the 15 Milestones teachers and the ninth graders to share educational opportunities. The Career and Technical Coordinator provided the counselors with results of surveys and interest inventories prior to the scheduled meetings.

The meetings enabled counselors and students to get to know each other better while increasing the students' awareness of services that can be provided to the students by the counselors. At the end of the year, the counselors developed a questionnaire that assessed the success of the program.



Hot Springs – Lake Hamilton High School

Lake Hamilton High School plans to improve academic achievement by increasing parental and community involvement in the school's educational mission.

Rather than focus on structured, school-wide activities that provide opportunities for social interaction between parents, the Lake Hamilton team decided to develop ways to routinely communicate with parents on a more personal, one-on-one basis.

The school assigned tasks to certain personnel:

Principals:

- Conduct a teacher inservice on conducting parent conferences and making phone calls (including better documentation of communication)
- Initiate contact with parents after a third disciplinary referral
- Mail letters to parents after a student is absent for three days

Counselors:

- Counselor-parent Communication* see page 5 and 6 (letters, phone calls, hit list, Thursday night conferences)
- Seminars (Transition for Success, Parents as Advisors, Strategies for Parents)
- Connection with Community (Business Expo, LH District PR Brochure, Media Releases)



Teachers:

- Initiate and document monthly "positive" phone calls to parents
- Initiate and document contact with parents of D and F students
- Personally invite parents to conferences

The Lake Hamilton team will assess progress of these efforts and later evaluate scores of benchmark tests and school grades to see if there has been improvement.

Attendance/discipline referrals will also be evaluated. For positive results, the team plans celebration assemblies for students, parent/volunteer breakfasts, and drawings to reward positive actions.

Lee County High School



The importance of a successful transition from junior high to high school is also the focus of the Lee County High School team.

However, the team is going to specifically focus on improving math

proficiency. A review of statistics showed that 60 to 70 percent of eighth grade students were failing math – certainly a predictor that they will continue to do poorly in ninth grade math courses.

The team worked to identify these students using test data. The action steps taken were/are to:

- 1) Enlist support of instructional specialists who will
 - Conduct an inservice before the start of school to train math personnel and assess math needs
 - Monitor curriculum
 - Monitor student progress
 - Report student progress back to staff members via "vertical teaming"
- 2) Have trained math teachers at both the middle school and high school level
- 3) Target the lowest-performing students and form sections of 20 or less. Schedule times to give these students "double doses" of math. Curriculum specialists will provide continual feedback.
- 4) Have students who fail Algebra I take Algebra I again
- 5) Have math teachers focus on one benchmark skill per week to hopefully achieve a marked increase of students scoring at basic/proficient level

The team, specifically the counselors, will be closely monitoring the percentage of students passing math courses and benchmark test results.

Counselors and other team members will also provide the school district with monthly updates of the math proficiency plan in the hopes that, by keeping the district routinely informed, the district in turn will provide needed assistance.

Lincoln High School

Lincoln High School's HSTW team developed and implemented a plan for providing a structured "Catch System" to help students who may lack academic preparation to complete an accelerated program of study that includes high level academic content.

The plan includes voluntary tutoring programs like "Zero Hour," offered every morning before school, and free afternoon tutoring provided by BETA Club members and community individuals.

The system also includes the mandatory programs of Reading Renaissance, a reading class for students who scored below basic on the reading portion of the state's eighth-grade benchmark test, and the "Drop Everything and Read Program," a 20-minute reading program held within the school day for all students.

Also, end-of-course tutoring sessions are held at designated times for students who did not master specific skills on the ACTAAP (Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program) pre-test in English and Math. A specific skill was taught in each of the tutoring sessions.

End-of-Course Academic Camps were also held after school for students who wanted to improve their skill level for the ACTAAP English and math components.

The team says the variety of programs offered within the school's "Catch Systems" allow staff to reach out to many students and help them meet their academic needs.



Little Rock - Central High School

Central High School's "Tiger Time," initiative is an integrated transitional keystone program that initiates a six-year career planning module, develops advanced thinking skills and pre-AP practices, strengthens self-esteem and promotes responsible citizenship for incoming freshmen.

"Tiger Time" will be implemented as part of Central High School's new Freshman Academy that will debut in the 2004-2005 school year.



Little Rock – J.A. Fair High School

J.A. Fair High School has also developed a Parent Involvement Program to encourage parents to play a more active role in their children's education and school experiences.

Monthly parent meetings began in December 2003. In the same month, staff held a Volunteer Appreciation Tea to thank parents for their work on behalf of the high school. A literacy volunteer program was launched in January and a Family Literacy and Math night was held in February.

The Fair team says they have seen an 80 percent increase in parental involvement with increased attendance at parent programs (indicated by participation logs).



Little Rock – Hall High School

Hall High School staff has chosen to revise its five-year Personalized Career Education Plan (PCEP) program for its school improvement project.

Staff development workshops will be conducted. They will focus on graduation requirements; college majors; available clubs and organizations; academic opportunities (honor graduates, honor societies, etc.); how to interpret transcripts and career interest inventories; and how to establish, review, and revise five-year plans.

Student chat groups will be created with a ratio of 10-15 students per advisor. The subjects of the chat groups will be the same as the staff development workshops with the staff sharing with students the information provided in those workshops.

The first chat group will talk about graduation requirements and college majors. The second chat group will review what was discussed at the first chat and students will learn more about the schools' clubs and organizations, and academic opportunities. The third chat group will be one-half day devoted to an advisor/student session on the student's transcript, career interest inventory, five-year plan, and the student's program of study for next year.

Hall will also have a PCEP Day where parents will come and meet with their child(ren) and advisor to examine the student's five-year plan and program of study. Both the parent and student will sign the plan/program of study. These documents will be returned to school counselors.



Little Rock - McClellan High School

McClellan High School's Guidance Department is developing a six-year career education plan. Staff will assist parents and students with formalizing a plan that directs the student's education. The team believes these plans will ensure that appropriate classes are taken and relevant experiences are provided to fulfill high school graduation requirements and meet future college and career goals.

Students begin early in middle school by exploring their abilities and



interests. In eighth grade, students will begin their six-year plan and will update it throughout high school.

The McClellan team believes that a six-year plan will provide students a direct correlation between school and work. Guidance counselors and teachers at both the middle school and high school level will assist students in completing and maintaining their plans. The plans will be used for enrollment, crediting for course requirements, and planning for graduation.

Little Rock – Parkview High School

For its school improvement project, Parkview has established a "Future Center," within the school that is open until 7:00 p.m. one night per week.

At the center, parents and students will be able to visit with a school counselor as well as research information on postsecondary education and careers. If a student is pursuing postsecondary education, there will also be information available on financial aid and scholarships.

The Parkview team says the project will:

- 1) Increase parental involvement
- 2) Strengthen the transition process from high school to careers and/or college for parents of seniors
- 3) Provide a college and career research center that is accessible to all parents and students grades after normal business hours.





Mountain Home High School

The Mountain Home High School team has used the school improvement project to reinforce the high school's recent move to the "wall-to-wall" Career Academy concept.

The project was to develop a six-year plan that is introduced in the ninth-grade keystone course. This plan is reviewed annually throughout high school and changes are made based on a student's continued engagement in a career path.

Second-semester juniors and first-semester seniors will take the Capstone course. The six-year plan is the essential document around which the student revises and works to actualize the first two years of his or her postsecondary education. The Capstone class also requires completion of a notebook that includes college/military/workforce applications, a personal resume, letters of recommendation, documentation of career/education exploration, and other related efforts.



Osceola High School

Osceola High School will be developing an action plan for eighth- and ninth-grade students to provide a smooth transition from junior high to high school because the ninth- and tenth-grade years are pivotal years for academics.

The goal of the action plan is to inspire students to enroll in challenging academic courses that will provide them with the opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education and/or employment.

For Osceola ninth-graders, the team will address academic success, overcoming a fear of high school, the benefits of attendance and good discipline, and the importance of study skills.

For eighth-graders, a day will be set aside for them to physically come to the high school campus to work on a four-year plan and class schedules, meet the faculty, and meet a panel of high school seniors. The seniors will talk about the high school's course handbook, clubs and organizations, graduation requirements, JROTC, and other topics. They will also share projects they have completed as part of their high school coursework.



Pine Bluff High School

The Pine Bluff team is administering Kuder Career Planning System inventories to all high school students.

English classes were scheduled into computer labs where the students were guided through the assessment process. Initially, 84 percent of the students had completed the process.

The Career Search component of the Kuder assessment will be printed, attached to the student's report cards, and given to the parent on Parent/Teacher Conference Day.



Rogers High School

Rogers High School has also embraced the Kuder Career Planning System. The Kuder project involved all sophomores in Social Studies classes meeting for a one period session in the computer lab to complete the Interest Inventory.

This was taught by Leslie Pappas, one of the sophomore counselors.

Materials were placed in the student's career folder in the homeroom classroom.

New career focus sheets were completed after the guidance sessions. Databases were revised by the Workforce Education director's office and used in spring counseling for class selection.



Springdale High School

The Springdale High School team is improving career orientation using ideas from the Keystone program. The team was granted permission from the school administrators to work on this project.

Counselors met with the junior high career orientation teachers and counselors to work on a plan focusing on lowering the failure rate of ninth-graders. The team decided to integrate study skills into the career orientation curriculum, working with career orientation staff from the Department of Workforce Education on the frameworks.

Springdale will conduct training with career orientation teachers in August to show them how to implement the new frameworks and curriculum.



Texarkana High School

Arkansas High School in Texarkana wanted a systemic guidance and advisement process, and an effective communication network for informing and involving parents and students.

The school improvement team conducted an all-day "Connected Counseling" workshop for the counselors. The goal was to restructure the counseling program to raise completion rates of all students by connecting every student to the HSTW key practices.

This outcome was emphasized by a Power Point presentation of the Arkansas School Counselors Association model and HSTW best practices. Prior to the workshop, an informal survey of students was conducted to assess counselor visibility and availability. 23 percent of students could not list their counselor by name, eight percent had seen a counselor less than three times this school year, and the vast majority of counselor contacts (44 percent) revolved around scheduling and credit checks. While the team realized the survey was not "scientifically sound," it did give them a benchmark against which to gauge the reformation of counselor services.

The team has completely reorganized and realigned counselor duties and responsibilities. Accountability procedures have also been redesigned. These new changes were implemented in May and staff is ready for the 2004-2005 school year.